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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 000179

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SUBJECT: CODEL SHAYS ENGAGES VATICAN ON MIDDLE EAST, SUDAN

REF: MARTIN - LARREA EMAILS AUG 25

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CLASSIFIED BY: Peter Martin, Pol/Econ Chief, Vatican, State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) CODEL Shays engaged DFM Parolin on the Middle East and Sudan August 24, capping a visit to these areas with a stop in Rome. Parolin told the CODEL that the families of the kidnapped Israeli soldiers had approached the papal representative in Jerusalem and that Church personnel were trying to gain information on the soldiers. Parolin agreed with Rep. Shays that the international community could not "wash its hands of the situation" in Iraq. Parolin said that the Holy See would support the implementation of a UN peacekeeping force in Darfur. Rep. Higgins raised the case of imprisoned AMCIIT journalist Paul Solopek; the Holy See is aware of the case, but, as per our advice, is not taking any action with the Sudanese. Looking at the Middle East as a whole, Parolin repeated the Vatican's concern for Christians in the region, depicting various communities as under siege. End Summary.

CODEL Meets Parolin

¶2. (C) CODEL Shays recounted for Holy See Deputy FM equivalent Pietro Parolin its recent visit to the Middle East and Sudan August 24, engaging him on several key issues. Congressmen Shays, Higgins, Inglis, and Green were accompanied by staff members and Poloff.

Lebanon

¶3. (C) Parolin explained for CODEL Shays the Holy See's perspective on the Israel - Hezbollah conflict, as reported previously by post. He also noted the recent visit to the

region by Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, former president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (septel). Parolin told CODEL that the families of the kidnapped Israeli soldiers had approached the papal representative in Jerusalem to see what help the Holy See could offer. Church personnel with regional ties were trying to find out whatever information they could on the whereabouts and well-being of the soldiers. Parolin said he had spoken recently to Israeli Ambassador Ben-Hur who said the soldiers were still alive.

Iraq

¶4. (C) Representative Shays made a strong case to Parolin that whatever the Holy See's thinking had been on the decision to intervene in Iraq, the country's stability was now the concern of the international community as a whole. Parolin was somewhat pessimistic about a situation in Iraq he saw verging on civil war, but agreed that it was a concern of the whole world - not just of the U.S. He noted that the pope and other Vatican officials had often called for attention to the situation in Iraq. Parolin was non-committal when Shays suggested that a strong call by the pope for greater international involvement in Iraq could be effective. He agreed, however, that the international community could not "wash its hands of the situation." "We all need to find a solution together," he concluded.

Sudan

¶5. (C) In response to a question from Rep. Green, Parolin said that the Holy See would support the establishment of a UN

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peacekeeping force in Darfur. He said that although the Vatican had not said anything formally on the subject, it looked on the idea favorably, especially in light of the Sudanese bishops' conference's support of the idea. Rep. Higgins raised the case of imprisoned AMCIIT journalist Paul Solopek, and asked if the Holy See might intervene on his behalf. Parolin said he would notify the papal nuncio in Sudan and look into the matter. [Note: After consulting with Department, we contacted Parolin's office and asked that the Holy See stand by on this request, for fear of disrupting efforts already underway on behalf of Solopek (ref a). Post relayed the information to Higgins, who was satisfied with this approach.]

Dialogue

¶6. (C) Parolin discussed the Holy See's philosophy of dialogue with the CODEL, expressing the Vatican's well-known principle that such interaction was the best way to attempt to change aberrant behavior. When asked by the CODEL, Parolin said the Holy See was not engaged in dialogue with Hezbollah, and had no current dialogue with Hamas. But Parolin repeated the Holy See's position on Hamas, insisting that while the Vatican would prefer contact with the president of the Palestinian Authority, the Holy See would not refuse an approach for talks from Hamas, if that were to occur. Parolin said he was under no illusions about Hamas's actions and philosophy, but doubted that refusing an advance by the group would help matters. "We will not seek contact, but neither will we refuse it if approached," he said.

Christians in the Middle East

17. (C) Looking at the Middle East as a whole, Parolin repeated the Vatican's concern for Christians in the region, depicting various communities as under siege. Many were fleeing, he said.

In many countries in the region, Parolin continued, Christians were the moderating influence that helped maintain stability. Whether in Iraq, Lebanon, or elsewhere, the loss of the Christian community would be a disaster for prospects for peace in the region.

ROONEY